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WATER

Duxbury water concerns eased

By John Chaffee
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DUXBURY — The town will consider replacing 15 miles of vinyl-lined water pipe that are leaching small levels of a chemical suspected of causing cancer.

About 45 residents of the latest neighborhood to be affected by perchloroethylene contamination met yesterday for 2½ hours with the selectmen and other state and local officials.

Most went away satisfied that their concerns about the safety of their drinking water are being addressed.

"We were reassured that they're going to get on the problem, but I don't think we'll be drinking the water right away," said Mary Leach of South River Lane East.

Tests last month on the water on Leach's street and Plantation Drive, which are off Route 14 in West Duxbury, detected a level of 14 parts of PCE per billion parts of water.

The maximum safe level recommended for PCE in a public water supply is 5 parts per billion, but state and local officials say there is no immediate threat to public health.

During the 1970s, vinyl-lined asbestos cement water

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mains were installed throughout the country. The pipes contain PCE, also known as tetrachloroethylene or TCE, and over time the chemical begins to show up in the water.

It is a particular problem on dead-end streets or on low-use water pipe loops, such as South River Lane and Plantation Drive, because the water remains in pipes for extended periods without circulating.

A common solution is to install a bleeder on the line to keep the water moving.

Larry Dayian, water supply chief in the Lakeville office of the Department of Environmental Protection, told the residents at yesterday's meeting that many other communities have experienced PCE contamination.

"It's not an uncommon problem," he said.

Michael Hutchinson, a state toxicologist who also attended the meeting, said much higher levels of PCE than those detected in the neighborhood would be required before the state would shut down a local water supply.

The selectmen yesterday released a list of 60 local streets with vinyl-lined asbestos cement water mains that were installed between 1969 and 1980.

Selectman Friend Weiler said he was surprised to find his street, Trout Farm Road, on the list.

"We've got to get every section of town that has this pipe tested and we've got to make the results known," Weiler said. "We should replace the pipes over time."

The cost of replacing all the PCE-contaminated pipe was estimated at \$4.7 million.

"That's not an insurmountable amount," Weiler said.

Weiler said the selectmen will establish a study committee at their next meeting.

"We need to know what it's going to take to get those pipes out of the ground," said Town Manager Rocco Longo, "and then we're going to need your help in getting town meeting approval."

Results of the tests on the neighborhood's water were not made public until a resident requested them.

Concerned residents who showed up at the water department office in town hall Monday night were not satisfied with the answers given in response to their questions, so Tuesday morning they started calling Longo.

Longo contacted the state officials and set up last night's meeting.

State and local officials provided copies of water quality tests that measured PCE levels in various parts of town. The tests date to 1980.

After last night's meeting, Mary Leach said she felt much better about the situation.

"I was really disappointed Monday night, but now my confidence in the town has been totally restored," she said.